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ABSTRACT

This report describes the current activities and future priorities of the Ceylon National Library Services Board, which was set up in 1970 for planning and developing library services on a national scale. Among other functions, the board is concerned with establishing the Ceylon National Library, promoting the development of library education and training, and publishing standard works in Sinhala and Tamil. (Author/JEG)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARY SERVICES IN SRI LANKA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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CEYLON NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICES BOARD
1977

The Development of Library Services in Sri Lanka

The Board

THE creation of a library authority for planning and developing library services on a national scale being treated as a matter of high priority in the educational programme of the country, the Ceylon National Library Services Board was set up in 1970 by an Act of Parliament, as a statutory agency under the Minister of Education. The Board consists of 9 members 2 of whom are appointed by the Minister of Housing and Research and the rest appointed by the Minister of Education from among prominent men in various walks of life. The Chairman of the Board is appointed by the Minister of Education and the Director, National Library Services, is the Secretary to the Board. The Board operates on its own fund to which money is voted by Parliament, besides donations, gifts and grants received from local and overseas sources.

Functions

In terms of the Ceylon National Library Services Board Act, the Board is empowered—

(*a*) to plan and assist in the promotion, organisation and development of Library Services in general ;

(*b*) to establish and maintain the Ceylon National Library ;

(*c*) to advise and assist in the promotion of school libraries ;

(*d*) to advise and assist in the promotion and development of Public Library Services ;

(*e*) to advise and assist in the publication of reading materials and the production of audio-visual aids ;

(*f*) to advise and assist in the co-ordination and development of University libraries, Junior University libraries, Technical college libraries, library services of local authorities, Government Departmental libraries and other special libraries ;

(*g*) to advise and assist the Government in fixing the minimum academic and professional qualifications for persons employed in library services ;

(*h*) to promote the development of library education and training ; and

(*i*) to carry out such other functions as may be necessary for the general promotion of library services.

Advisory Committees

The Board is assisted and advised by several Committees to carry out its objectives and functions. Besides the Public Libraries Committee and the School Libraries Committee which are statutory requirements, an Education Advisory Committee, National Libraries Committee, National Bibliography Committee and a Book Selection Committee have been set up as standing Committees with the commencement of services related and relevant to areas of work of these Committees.

The Board is an institutional member of the IFLA, Library Association, London, and other professional organisations.

National Library

One of the most important responsibilities of the Ceylon National Library Services Board is the establishment of the National Library and the Documentation Centre. Pre-requisites for a National Library already exist ; (*a*) Legal deposit of books commenced in 1885 under the Printers' and Publishers' Ordinance and comprehensive collections which may form the nucleus of the National Library already exist in the repositories of the National Archives and the National Museums, Colombo. An amendment to the Act in 1976 entitles the Board to receive a copy too. (*b*) A complete record of the books and periodicals printed and published within the country is published in the *Ceylon Government Gazette* dating back to 1885. A more formal and scientific recording was started in 1962 with the publication of the *Ceylon National Bibliography* (now, Sri Lanka National Bibliography). Thus the immediate task the Board needs to concentrate on is to make necessary accommodation and create the organisational framework to formalise the functioning of the National Library from which other traditional services will trigger off.

In 1975 the Cabinet approved a sum of Rs. 11.5 million for the construction of the National Library building and a plot of land in the heart of the city, valued over Rs. 2 million, was granted to the Board for the building. UNESCO provided the services of a Consultant Architect and the construction work is well under way. The building will have a capacity of housing 100,000 volumes and provide accommodation for 320 readers. It will also provide space for the National Documentation Centre and the Bibliographic Division, Auditorium with a seating capacity of 80 and 2 lecture halls, office area for the Ceylon National Library Services Board and a few related institutions which will co-operate with the Board in Library Education programmes and directing school and Public Library Services, work places for 80 members of the staff, stores, cafeteria, toilet and garage facilities for the staff, readers and visitors. Considerable foreign aid for equipment and library materials not locally obtainable is expected from friendly governments and international organisations.

A skeleton staff is already recruited and financial provision is made in the estimates to recruit necessary staff as and when the services develop. Money is voted for the purchase of rare works and fugitive material which may not be available later on. Temporary accommodation to house the National Library Book Collection accrued through legal deposit and purchases has already been provided. The Board solicits gifts and donations of rare and valuable books, documents, manuscripts, etc., for the National Collection.

Deposit Library

The Board maintains the National deposit library for local publications which also receives a copy of every UNESCO publication.

Library Development Project

The development programme of the Library Services Board started off with a pilot project begun in 1970 with UNESCO aid. Since then this programme has been extended to cover the entire island, approximately 50 libraries being selected annually for development on a District basis. These project libraries, as they are called, are entitled to a donation of books and periodicals, basic library furniture such as bookshelves, periodical racks, book supports, readers' tables and chairs and such equipment as accession registers, book pockets, date slips and readers' tickets. Libraries whose collections are inadequate for maintaining a minimum loan service are supplemented with book loans from the Board's Book Bank, every three months. Books gifted by Ranfurly in U.K. are also given away as outright donations to many Public and School Libraries. Free training of librarians in elements of library administration and library technology is another aspect of the Board's assistance to these libraries.

Libraries which do not fall within the annual project programme also are given considerable assistance in matters relating to establishment and advice in services. Supply of model library building plans, specifications for library furniture and equipment are two widely sought forms of assistance and counselling in matters of professional/administrative disharmony deadlocks and advice to authorities on grading of libraries and librarians, etc., are frequently given.

Under the development programme a total of 175 school libraries and 175 public libraries have been assisted up to date. A large number of Non-project libraries made up of libraries in agricultural colonies, Book clubs of rural development associations, temples, societies, etc., have been similarly supported. In 1977 January, the Board approved a project of creating new libraries in areas where library facilities are nil, in collaboration with the Local Government authorities and the Ministry of Education, which was hitherto the sole responsibility of these authorities.

Under the scheme proposed the Board steps into the role of library creator in addition to being a library supporter. The programme will be launched in 1978. An important project to be launched in 1978 is the development of libraries of teacher-training colleges the services of which have left much to be desired. The ultimate aim of the library development scheme is to create a National Library infra-structure where all types of Library Services will be co-ordinated to form a viable National Library Service. High priority is given to the establishment and development of school and public libraries to conform to minimum standards of services.

Library Education and Training

On an evaluation of the facilities available in the country for library Education and training, the Board has isolated the following priorities, which need urgent attention :

(1) provide educational and training facilities to untrained and unqualified personnel already in library service ;

(2) provide facilities of continuing education and up-dating knowledge of library staff who have obtained basic qualifications and/or training ;

(3) to make available educational facilities to fresh entrants who choose librarianship as a career.

With these objectives the Board envisages the commencement of a correspondence course in Library and Information Science supplemented by necessary practical work experience, discussions, seminars, etc. The course is of 2 years' duration to be offered in two parts and the examination will be conducted by the Department of Examinations of the Ministry of Education on behalf of the Board. The certificates will be equivalent to the Sri Lanka Library Association Final Certificate and Part II of the professional Examination of the Library Association, U.K. Provision is made for students attached to a formal library school to sit the Board examinations, if they so desire. To implement the programme a Library Education and Training Branch has been set up with an Assistant Director who is in charge of the project under the supervision of the Director.

The Education Advisory Committee of the Board is delegated the authority to evaluate courses in Library Science and Certificates issued by various Library schools and make recommendations to the Board. The Board acts as the final authority in advising the Ministry of Public Administration on fixing minimum qualifications for librarians in the Public Service and Local Government Service and the recognition of certificates.

The training of new staff recruited to service in school libraries and public libraries is an important responsibility the Board has undertaken. The Philosophy behind the training programme is that if all librarians

adhered to a uniform fundamental list of duties and library methods, development of technical services in libraries will be even, which will facilitate library co-operation at a later stage. Thus new staff irrespective of their qualifications or previous training are encouraged and are afforded the facilities for this training.

Library Supervision

As a logical step to training of staff and provision of assistance to libraries is the evaluation and assessment of the progress made by the librarians which come under the development project. With this objective periodic inspections are conducted by the Board's professional staff and the findings of the inspectors are analysed and studied with a view to reviewing methodology applied. The findings are conveyed to the appropriate authorities for remedial action, if necessary.

The education and training courses are designed with a view to training operational staff of various types of libraries which form the library infra-structure being built by the Board.

Publication of Professional Literature

The acute shortage of professional literature in Sinhala and Tamil has considerably hampered the efforts of many organisations concerned with professional activities, particularly education. The Board has, therefore, taken steps to publish standard works in these languages. The *IFLA standards for public libraries* was translated and published in 1977. A complete list of Board publications may be obtained on request. The Board also publishes a quarterly journal which serves as the medium of communication between the Board and those interested in library work.

Prospects

With the establishment of the National Library and the Documentation Centre it is evisaged that bibliographic activities of all types will be undertaken. First in the priority list is the compilation of National Union Catalogues. In the field of documentation, the National Library will concentrate more particularly in Social Sciences as Science and Technology is already covered by such institutions as the National Science Council with its satellites the special libraries, but the National Library will take the leadership in the co-ordination of bibliographic activities of various organisations. It will also be the centre of national and international loans and exchanges, in short the focal point of national and international library activities.